

# Writing Personal Statements for Graduate School

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## Sample 1: “Hook”

My purpose in undertaking graduate study in the PsyD program at George Washington University is to develop my skills and knowledge of therapy in preparation for a career as a psychotherapist. I have a long-held interest in mental illness that began during high school and deepened during my undergraduate clinical psychology courses. I became fascinated by the impact of mental illness on the brain and behavior and by the myriad of treatments available. My commitment towards pursuing a career as a practitioner was established during my summer internship at Northgate Clinic, an inpatient psychiatric unit for adolescents in London. Observing therapy groups and reporting on patient progress I was engrossed in the changes that I saw in the patients during the two months I was there. I grew to care deeply about the teens I worked with every day and was saddened to leave the clinic at the end of the summer. It was then that I determined that a career spent working with children and adolescents struggling with mental illness would be both worthwhile and personally rewarding.

## Sample 2: “Hook”

I have always been inspired by the complexity of interdisciplinary work. When I began my studies at College X, I intended to major in philosophy. I was fascinated by the richness of a subject that had applications in logic, language, truth, mind, aesthetics, and ethics; philosophy seemed a rich field with limitless boundaries for problem solving. I also knew that I enjoyed the descriptive and quantitative nature of math and physics. Thus, my first semester at College X, I decided to try an engineering course. My first project aimed to build a toy that taught a physics concept demonstrated in a musculoskeletal system. I chose to show how the different lengths of the jaw of a tiger versus an alligator were adapted to different hunting tactics demonstrating the relevance of lever arm in torque. At the end of this project, I got to teach a class of enthusiastic 6th graders about angular acceleration and torque in tigers and alligators. Consequently, I too found myself incredibly enthusiastic about engineering and decided I couldn't leave College X without majoring in it.

## Sample 3: “Hook”

It was at Y University where, through close interactions with my peers and mentors, my enthusiasm for science and research first took root and flourished. Although I began my undergraduate education majoring solely in biology, it didn't take long after my first encounter with synthetic organic chemistry for me to realize that I wanted to focus on the area where

chemistry and biology overlap. I added chemistry as a second major and sought to integrate both fields through advanced coursework in molecular/cellular biology and organic synthesis. Furthermore, I took advantage of research opportunities in both fields. The underlying passion that fueled my academic and research career to date is the same that leads me now to pursue a graduate degree in the field of chemical biology. I am drawn to this area due to its emphasis on integrating the principles and techniques employed in both biology and chemistry to address specific questions.

#### **Sample 4: Science explanation**

After completing my bachelor's degree, I accepted a fellowship with the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD. I am currently associated with the Lab of Cellular and Developmental Biology headed by Dr. Kenneth Yamada, and working under the direct supervision of Dr. Kurt Musselman. As part of my research, I employ laser capture microdissection and microarray analysis to study gene expression in the developing submandibular gland. Our objectives are to characterize the expression profile of the developing gland and identify novel genes involved in the process of branching morphogenesis. It has been amazing for me to work alongside many top-notch scientists at one of the world's leading research centers. One of the most notable things I have observed while at the NIH is the interdisciplinary nature of modern scientific research and the need for communication between different fields.

#### **Sample 5: Science explanation**

In May of 2008, I graduated with a BA in chemistry from New College of Florida, an undergraduate institution focused on original and independent research. I successfully completed an eighty-page thesis, "Reactions of Zinc and Magnesium Salts with Acetol and Carbon Dioxide as Models for Catalysis by RuBisCO." As part of the requirements of the thesis, I was responsible for planning and carrying out all of my own experimentation and successfully defending my thesis before a committee of chemistry faculty. My research involved using simple organic molecules to mimic catalysis at the active site of the photosynthetic enzyme, RuBisCO. I used NMR spectroscopy to monitor the formation of new carbon-carbon bonds between acetol, a RuBisCO substrate mimic, and carbon dioxide, with the larger goal of mitigating the effects of greenhouse gas emissions on global warming. During the eighteen months I spent preparing my thesis, I developed strong critical thinking and research skills, and working closely with my professors on this project showed me the importance of collaborative research.

#### **Sample 6: "Why this program"**

While I have specific interests in toxicology, I find many areas of molecular biology fascinating. The flexibility of the BBSP program at the University of North Carolina is appealing to me because it will allow me to explore the field of toxicology while still having the option to rotate in other molecular biology labs. In addition I like the fact that the Curriculum in Toxicology is composed of faculty from several different institutions including the National Institute of

Environmental Health Sciences and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In particular, I find the work of Dr. Suzanne Fenton on mammary gland development and of Dr. Elizabeth Wilson on steroid hormone receptors intriguing due to their focus on toxic chemicals found in our environment. I also find the work of Dr. Linda Birnbaum on polychlorinated biphenyls equally fascinating. I feel that graduate studies at the University of North Carolina can provide me with the education and training that I need to have a successful career in the field of toxicology, and I look forward to visiting the campus and meeting faculty.